

# Land Recycling Initiative

By: Leslie Williams, Hazardous Materials Coordinator

What happens to those old abandoned gas stations we see around street corners in the County? What can the County do to return these properties to productive use?

Tax delinquency is often the connection between the abandoned property and the County. When a property owner fails to pay their taxes, the County begins a process intended to recover those lost monies. During the process the County reimburses other taxing jurisdictions and holds the entire tax debt. Typically, after the County has held the debt for three years it takes ownership, gets an appraisal, and sells the property at auction to recover the tax debt.

There are many reasons why properties become tax delinquent.

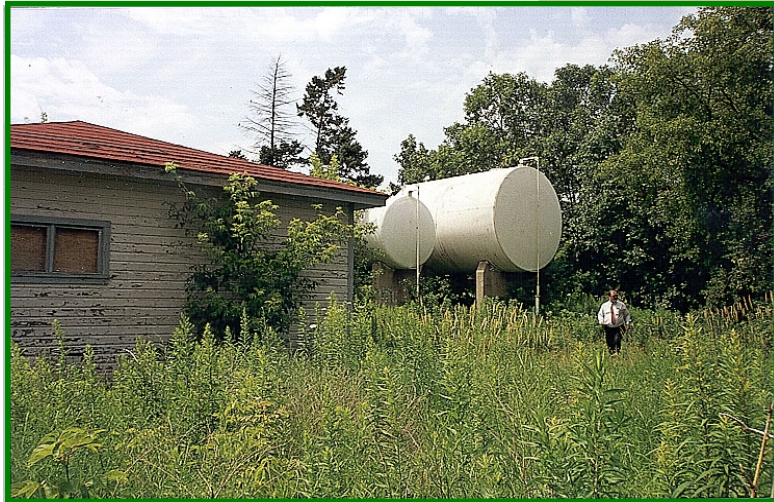
One is real or perceived environmental contamination. These properties are often dubbed Brownfields. The private owner may find that clean-up costs exceed the value of the property. No one will buy

---

*Our practice has been to review delinquent properties for environmental concerns*

---

it so the owner stops paying taxes. Deciding to acquire these properties is a gamble for the County. If we don't take ownership, the tax debt accumulates. If we do acquire in hopes of selling at auction, we could be left holding an environmental liability. Often interested parties are kept at bay by a lack of useful information about the extent of contamination or cost of fixing the problem. Our practice has been to review delinquent properties for environmental concerns prior to the actual taking and group them into two categories acquire and do not acquire. A few properties have languished for years on the do not acquire list until by statute we were required to forgive the tax debt. Others we now own are not selling due to incomplete environmental information and/or a lack of marketing resources.



***The private owner may find that clean-up costs exceed the value of the property.***

Brownfields properties can be seen as a resource to be redeveloped in order to increase tax revenues and employment opportunities. Brownfields redevelopment can also mean an increase in open space and recreational areas for residents and nonresidents alike.

The Environmental Health Division has asked for money in the County Executive's 2002 Budget to create a self-replenishing environmental services fund to pursue Land Recycling projects. We will target funds toward tax delinquent parcels with the highest potential for redevelopment and marketability. We will work to access State clean-up funds and partner with municipalities and interested parties to return these properties to the tax rolls.